

***POLICY ON THE RELEASE OF MARINE ORGANISMS***

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Division of Marine Fisheries Management

**September 2009**

For purposes of this policy, marine organisms are defined as an organism, including anadromous and catadromous organisms and plants that has a natural portion of its life cycle that is dependent upon marine or estuarine waters, but excluding striped bass (*Morone saxatilis*), American eels (*Anguila rostrata*), non-living shells, marine reptiles, marine mammals, and birds.

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) authorizes certain conservation-related activities for research, educational, exhibitional, stock enhancement, and stock restoration purposes, and authorizes the collection of broodstock for commerce aquaculture production purposes. The FWC recognizes the conservation value and economic importance of these activities, but also recognizes there are risks associated with allowing these activities to include the release of marine organisms that have been held in captivity. These risks include (but are not limited to):

- The introduction or spreading of diseases that affect marine organisms.
- The potential for adversely impacting the genetic diversity of wild stocks.
- Human consumption of marine organisms that have been treated with chemicals while in captivity and then released into the wild.
- Behavioral conditioning of predatory marine organisms held in captivity that may result in those organisms learning to associate humans with food when released into the wild.

This FWC policy has been established to prohibit the release or minimize the risks associated with the release of marine organisms into the wild that were collected pursuant to special authorization from the FWC.

This policy does not regulate the release of organisms harvested as broodstock or wild stock, bred or reared in captivity, and subsequently released for scientific research, stock enhancement, or stock restoration purposes. The release of marine organisms associated with these activities requires a Stock Collection and Release SAL, and the release requirements for this SAL may be found in FWC Rule 68B-8.010, F.A.C.

This policy does not prohibit the release of marine organisms that are temporarily possessed in order to conduct field activities such as identification, measuring, weighing, cataloguing, photographing, tagging, etc., where such activities do not result in retaining the organisms in captivity or releasing them outside of the immediate area where field activities are being conducted.

This policy does prohibit the release of all broodstock, broodstock progeny (offspring), or wild-born marine organisms collected, maintained, bred, or reared in captivity for commerce aquaculture production purposes. Broodstock harvested for purposes of commerce aquaculture production do not need to be rotated with wild stock to preserve the genetic integrity of the captive-reared stock, and do not necessitate their release.

This policy does prohibit the release of any non-indigenous marine organism, irregardless if it was originally collected pursuant to special authorization from the FWC.

This policy does prohibit the release of finfish maintained in captivity for longer than 30 days.

This policy does not prohibit the release of finfish maintained in captivity for 30 days or less provided that the Captivity Requirements and Release Requirements established by this policy are strictly adhered to.

This policy does not prohibit the release of invertebrates that have been maintained in captivity regardless of the length of time, provided that the Captivity Requirements and Release Requirements established by this policy are strictly adhered to. Invertebrates do not contract finfish diseases, and the possibility of introducing or spreading invertebrate diseases should be greatly minimized with the institution of requirements for containment, feeding, treatment and release. Typical health problems with invertebrates in captivity consist of shell rot or opportunistic bacterial and protozoan infections due to an inappropriate pH balance or food source, and do not require chemicals for disease control to treat the problem.

### **Captivity Requirements**

Finfish that have been retained in captivity for 30 days or less, and invertebrates that have been retained in captivity regardless of the length of time, may be released provided the organisms have been maintained according to the following requirements:

- **Containment System Preparation** - Prior to the introduction of marine organisms that are targeted for release into a containment system, the system must be thoroughly cleaned (including filter change) to prevent the spread of disease. When adding new organisms to a closed containment system, cleaning is not required if the system previously held, or currently holds, organisms originating from the same genetic unit (or same county if the genetic unit is not known), and the same coast in Florida. When adding new organisms to a flow-through containment system, cleaning is not required if the system previously held or currently holds organisms originating from the same genetic unit or county, and the same coast in Florida into which the water is being discharged.
- **Containment System Inhabitants** – All marine organisms targeted for release must be maintained with species originating from the same genetic unit (or same county if the genetic unit is not known), and the same coast in Florida.
- **Food Source** – Fresh-caught food that is given to all marine organisms held in the same containment system as the organisms targeted for release must originate from Florida and from the same coast where the organisms were harvested. Frozen food or commercially processed dry food such as pellets, flakes, wafers, etc., are acceptable food sources regardless of their origin.
- **Treatment Chemicals** – Marine organisms targeted for release may not be treated with chemicals such as malachite green, marine ich treatment chemicals, copper sulfate, antibiotics, formalin or anesthetics (MS-222, clove oil, quinaldine, etc), unless use of such chemicals is in compliance with established Food and Drug Administration (FDA) guidelines or are veterinarian-prescribed. This does not include chemicals used to maintain water chemistry (to control pH, ammonia, or nitrite levels) and does not include vitamins or other nutritional supplements. Chemicals that are not approved by the FDA

or prescribed by a veterinarian may not be used on any organisms targeted for release. Any organisms treated with veterinarian-prescribed chemicals may not be released until the withdrawal period specified by the veterinarian has expired.

**Release Requirements**

Marine organisms that were collected pursuant to special authorization from the FWC and have been maintained in accordance with the Captivity Requirements may be released provided they are released in the same genetic unit (or same county if the genetic unit is not known), and the same coast, from where they were collected. Organisms may not be released if they have external lesions or abnormalities, appear to be sick or exhibit abnormal behavior, or were originally harvested from areas where the presence of a disease in the same species targeted for release has been observed.